**Common Core State Standards: English Language Arts**

**[Reading: Informational Text](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/7017)**

9-10.RIT.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion...

**[Writing](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/7018)**

9-10.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. 9-10.W.2.1 Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas,...

9-10.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. 9-10.W.3.1 Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing...

English 9 Honors, Essay #1: The Definition Essay

Students will examine a professional model of an essay of definition, analyze the effect of using anecdotes and cause/effect relationships to develop an essay of definition, and practice using anecdotes and cause/effect structures in their own writing.

*What is a definition?* A **definition** tells what a term means and how it is different from other terms in its class. While **formal definitions** are brief, succinct explanations, **extended definitions** are longer, more complex, and explain what something, or even someone, *is*. An extended definition includes three basic parts of a formal definition—the term, its class, and its distinguishing characteristics.

*How do you organize a definition essay?* There are five different organizational patterns you may use:

1. Exemplification: Give examples of situations that would mirror the definition of the word.
2. Description: Describe the item or situation; give your reader a strong visual.
3. Comparison and contrast: Explain similar or different situations as they relate to your word.
4. Process: Give step-by-step or stage-by-stage instructions.
5. Classification and division: Divide your topic into subcategories and explain each categories traits.

You can also expand your definition with other strategies:

1. Synonyms (words with similar meaning)
2. Negation (what the word is not)
3. Enumeration (listing its characteristics)
4. Analogies (comparisons that identify similarities between the term and something dissimilar)
5. Origin and development (the word’s derivation, original meaning, and usages)

*How should you structure your essay?* You need to include an introduction (with a clear thesis statement), a body, and a conclusion. Because you are creating an extended definition, you may be more subjective than a formal definition. You need to remember your audience; what background information would they already know and what would you need to make known.

*What should your focus of revision be?* Pay attention to these specific items when revising:

* Does your essay include a clearly stated thesis that identifies the term you will define and communicates your approach to the definition?
* Have you included a formal definition of your subject? Of any additional key terms?
* Have you identified a pattern or patterns of development to expand your definition?
* Have you used other strategies to expand your definition?
* Have you discussed the origin and development of the term?

*What should your focus of editing be?* Pay attention to these specific items when editing:

* Have you avoided the use of *is when* and *is where*? The use of these phrases indicates that you are actually presenting an example of the term and not a definition. You can avoid this error by making certain that the form of the verb *be* is followed by a noun.
* Have you used the present tense for your definition—even if you have used the past tense elsewhere?
* If you have used a definition from a dictionary, have you italicized the term you are defining and placed the definition itself in quotation marks?

**Prewriting Activity**

Write your word/term here:  \_\_\_\_FREEDOM\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Consider different ways to describe the term you’re defining.
2. What sorts of examples would best illustrate it?
3. What kind of conflict might the word involve?
4. To what is it similar?
5. What metaphor could be used with this term?
6. Are there any steps involved with this word?  Are they crucial?
7. What connotations are associated with your word?
8. What is the denotation of the word?  (Look it up in the dictionary and write the complete definition here. Be sure to add this source to your works cited page.)
9. List eight synonyms for your word
10. How is this word used in your choice novel? List three quotations from the text to illustrate this meaning. Be sure to add this source to your works cited page
11. Select 3 of the short texts we studied in class that you feel best illustrate the word. Choose quotations that you feel are the best examples of this word from each text (at least one from each, but you may need more). Be sure to add this source to your works cited page.

Definition Essay Example

"What Is Poverty?" by Jo Goodwin Parker

The following selection was published in *America's Other Children: Public Schools Outside Suburbs*, by George Henderson in 1971 by the University of Oklahoma Press. The author has requested that no biographical information about her be distributed. The essay is a personal account, addressed directly to the reader, about living in poverty.

You ask me, what is poverty? Listen to me. Here I am, dirty, smelly, and with no "proper" underwear on and with the stench of my rotting teeth near you. I will tell you. Listen to me. Listen without pity. I cannot use your pity. Listen with understanding. Put yourself in my dirty, worn out, ill-fitting shoes, and hear me.

Poverty is getting up every morning from a dirt- and illness-stained mattress. The sheets have long since been used for diapers. Poverty is living in a smell that never leaves. This is a smell of urine, sour milk, and spoiling food sometimes joined with the strong smell of long-cooked onions. Onions are cheap. If you have smelled this smell, you did not know how it came. It is the smell of the outdoor privy. It is the smell of young children who cannot walk the long dark way in the night. It is the smell of the mattresses where years of "accidents" have happened. It is the smell of the milk which has gone sour because the refrigerator long has not worked, and it costs money to get it fixed. It is the smell of rotting garbage. I could bury it, but where is the shovel? Shovels cost money.

Poverty is being tired. I have always been tired. They told me at the hospital when the last baby came that I had chronic anemia caused from poor diet, a bad case of worms, and that I needed a corrective operation. I listened politely - the poor are always polite. The poor always listen. They don't say that there is no money for iron pills, or better food, or worm medicine. The idea of an operation is frightening and costs so much that, if I had dared, I would have laughed. Who takes care of my children? Recovery from an operation takes a long time. I have three children. When I left them with "Granny" the last time I had a job, I came home to find the baby covered with fly specks, and a diaper that had not been changed since I left. When the dried diaper came off, bits of my baby's flesh came with it. My other child was playing with a sharp bit of broken glass, and my oldest was playing alone at the edge of a lake. I made twenty-two dollars a week, and a good nursery school costs twenty dollars a week for three children. I quit my job.

Poverty is dirt. You can say in your clean clothes coming from your clean house, "Anybody can be clean." Let me explain about housekeeping with no money. For breakfast I give my children grits with no oleo or cornbread without eggs and oleo. This does not use up many dishes. What dishes there are, I wash in cold water and with no soap. Even the cheapest soap has to be saved for the baby's diapers. Look at my hands, so cracked and red. Once I saved for two months to buy a jar of Vaseline for my hands and the baby's diaper rash. When I had saved enough, I went to buy it and the price had gone up two cents. The baby and I suffered on. I have to decide every day if I can bear to put my cracked sore hands into the cold water and strong soap. But you ask, why not hot water? Fuel costs money. If you have a wood fire it costs money. If you burn electricity, it costs money. Hot water is a luxury. I do not have luxuries. I know you will be surprised when I tell you how young I am. I look so much older. My back has been bent over the wash tubs every day for so long, I cannot remember when I ever did anything else. Every night I wash every stitch my school age child has on and just hope her clothes will be dry by morning.

Poverty is staying up all night on' cold nights to watch the fire knowing one spark on the newspaper covering the walls means your sleeping child dies in flames. In summer poverty is watching gnats and flies devour your baby's tears when he cries. The screens are torn and you pay so little rent you know they will never be fixed. Poverty means insects in your food, in your nose, in your eyes, and crawling over you when you sleep. Poverty is hoping it never rains because diapers won't dry when it rains and soon you are using newspapers. Poverty is seeing your children forever with runny noses. Paper handkerchiefs cost money and all your rags you need for other things. Even more costly are antihistamines. Poverty is cooking without food and cleaning without soap.

Poverty is asking for help. Have you ever had to ask for help, knowing 6 your children will suffer unless you get it? Think about asking for a loan from a relative, if this is the only way you can imagine asking for help. I will tell you how it feels. You find out where the office is that you are supposed to visit. You circle that block four or five times. Thinking of your children, you go in. Everyone is very busy. Finally, someone comes out and you tell her that you need help. That never is the person you need to see. You go see another person, and after spilling the whole shame of your poverty all over the desk between you, you find that this isn't the right office after all-you must repeat the whole process, and it never is any easier at the next place.

You have asked for help, and after all it has a cost. You are again told to wait. You are told why, but you don't really hear because of the red cloud of shame and the rising cloud of despair.

Poverty is remembering. It is remembering quitting school in junior high because "nice" children had been so cruel about my clothes and my smell. The attendance officer came. My mother told him I was pregnant. I wasn't, but she thought that I could get a job and help out. I had jobs off and on, but never long enough to learn anything. Mostly I remember being married. I was so young then. I am still young. For a time, we had all the things you have. There was a little house in another town, with hot water and everything. Then my husband lost his job. There was unemployment insurance for a while and what few jobs I could get. Soon, all our nice things were repossessed and we moved back here. I was pregnant then. This house didn't look so bad when we first moved in. Every week it gets worse. Nothing is ever fixed. We now had no money. There were a few odd jobs for my husband, but everything went for food then, as it does now. I don't know how we lived through three years and three babies, but we did. I'll tell you something, after the last baby I destroyed my marriage. It had been a good one, but could you keep on bringing children in this dirt? Did you ever think how much it costs for any kind of birth control? I knew my husband was leaving the day he left, but there were no goodbye between us. I hope he has been able to climb out of this mess somewhere. He never could hope with us to drag him down.

That's when I asked for help. When I got it, you know how much it was? It was, and is, seventy-eight dollars a month for the four of us; that is all I ever can get. Now you know why there is no soap, no needles and thread, no hot water, no aspirin, no worm medicine, no hand cream, no shampoo. None of these things forever and ever and ever. So that you can see clearly, I pay twenty dollars a month rent, and most of the rest goes for food. For grits and cornmeal, and rice and milk and beans. I try my best to use only the minimum electricity. If I use more, there is that much less for food.

Poverty is looking into a black future. Your children won't play with my boys. They will turn to other boys who steal to get what they want. I can already see them behind the bars of their prison instead of behind the bars of my poverty. Or they will turn to the freedom of alcohol or drugs, and find themselves enslaved. And my daughter? At best, there is for her a life like mine.

But you say to me, there are schools. Yes, there are schools. My children have no extra books, no magazines, no extra pencils, or crayons, or paper and most important of all, they do not have health. They have worms, they have infections, they have pink-eye all summer. They do not sleep well on the floor, or with me in my one bed. They do not suffer from hunger, my seventy-eight dollars keeps us alive, but they do suffer from malnutrition. Oh yes, I do remember what I was taught about health in school. It doesn't do much good.

In some places there is a surplus commodities program. Not here. The country said it cost too much. There is a school lunch program. But I have two children who will already be damaged by the time they get to school.

But, you say to me, there are health clinics. Yes, there are health clinics and they are in the towns. I live out here eight miles from town. I can walk that far (even if it is sixteen miles both ways), but can my little children? My neighbor will take me when he goes; but he expects to get paid, one way or another. I bet you know my neighbor. He is that large man who spends his time at the gas station, the barbershop, and the corner store complaining about the government spending money on the immoral mothers of illegitimate children.

Poverty is an acid that drips on pride until all pride is worn away. Poverty is a chisel that chips on honor until honor is worn away. Some of you say that you would do something in my situation, and maybe you would, for the first week or the first month, but for year after year after year?

Even the poor can dream. A dream of a time when there is money. Money for the right kinds of food, for worm medicine, for iron pills, for toothbrushes, for hand cream, for a hammer and nails and a bit of screening, for a shovel, for a bit of paint, for some sheeting, for needles and thread. Money to pay in money for a trip to town. And, oh, money for hot water and money for soap. A dream of when asking for help does not eat away the last bit of pride. When the office you visit is as nice as the offices of other governmental agencies, when there are enough workers to help you quickly, when workers do not quit in defeat and despair. When you have to tell your story to only one person, and that person can send you for other help and you don't have to prove your poverty over and over and over again.

I have come out of my despair to tell you this. Remember I did not come from another place or another time. Others like me are all around you. Look at us with an angry heart, anger that will help.